PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO POWER, MANIPULATION, AND COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR IN GEORGE ORWELL'S ANIMAL FARM

Ahmad Rizal Abdullah
ahmad.rizal.abdullah@unm.ac.id
Universitas Negeri Makassar

Abstract

This study explores the psychological mechanisms of power, manipulation, and collective behavior in George Orwell's Animal Farm. Using a qualitative approach, 20 selected excerpts from the novel were analyzed to identify strategies of authority assertion, propaganda, fear induction, herd behavior, and historical revision. The findings show that authority is reinforced both symbolically and psychologically, propaganda shapes collective cognition, fear ensures compliance, and collective rituals strengthen group cohesion. The study bridges literary analysis and social psychology, demonstrating how Orwell's allegory illustrates the dynamics of obedience, conformity, and ideological control. The results provide insights into the psychological underpinnings of power structures and highlight the value of literature in understanding social influence and human behavior.

Keywords: Power, Manipulation, Collective Behavior, Animal Farm, Social Psychology, Literature, Propaganda, Authority

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long been understood as a medium that reflects human behavior, social structures, and psychological realities. According to Wellek and Warren (1949) in Theory of Literature, literature is a structured representation of human life that mirrors societal tensions and psychological motivations. Similarly, Terry Eagleton (1976) in Literary Theory: An Introduction argues that literature is inseparable from ideological forces, as texts often reveal hidden mechanisms of power within society. These perspectives position literature not merely as artistic expression but as a dynamic arena for examining psychological and ideological phenomena.

Within literary forms, prose fiction plays a crucial role in articulating social and psychological dynamics. M.H. Abrams (1957) in A Glossary of Literary Terms describes prose as a flexible narrative medium capable of capturing character psychology and ideological conflict through descriptive detail and narrative progression. Northrop Frye (1957) in Anatomy of Criticism further explains that allegorical and satirical prose enables authors to expose societal contradictions through symbolic representation. Thus, prose becomes a strategic tool for exploring

the mechanisms through which individuals and groups respond to authority, persuasion, and collective pressures.

George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945) stands as a powerful example of how prose can function as both social critique and psychological exploration. As noted by Christopher Hitchens (2002) in Orwell's Victory, Orwell's achievement lies in his ability to translate political reality into moral fable, making the dynamics of power and manipulation visible through narrative. Meanwhile, Orwell scholar John Rodden (1999) argues that Animal Farm operates not only as a political allegory but also as a psychological study of manipulation, fear, and the internalization of authoritarian ideology. Through anthropomorphic characters, Orwell dramatizes how authority is sustained through propaganda, revision of truth, and the shaping of collective memory.

In recent years, researchers have begun to revisit Animal Farm through linguistic and psychological lenses. Anggela, Ardiansyah, and Wardoyo (2025) examine how Squealer's discourse functions at multiple cognitive levels to shape the animals' collective perception and enforce obedience. Safaa K. Merzah (2024) analyzes rhetorical strategies such as fallacies, historical distortion, and scapegoating that help the pigs legitimize authority and suppress dissent. Pardede, Rasyid, and Anwar (2023) demonstrate that language operates as a political instrument enabling the ruling class to control narrative truth and influence less-educated animals. These studies illuminate important dimensions of discourse and persuasion within the novel.

However, despite their insights, these works tend to isolate specific aspects of manipulation and do not integrate them into a broader psychological framework. As Erich Fromm (1941) notes in Escape From Freedom, authoritarian systems draw their power not only from coercion but from psychological mechanisms that make individuals seek security in submission. Yet this crucial dimension—how psychological needs and collective behavior interact with manipulative leadership—remains under-addressed in recent scholarship on Orwell's novella.

The present study seeks to fill this gap by adopting an interdisciplinary psychological approach to Animal Farm. Utilizing French and Raven's (1959) bases of social power, Cialdini's (1984) principles of persuasion, Milgram's (1963) findings on obedience, and Le Bon's (1895) theory of crowd behavior, this research analyzes how authority is constructed, legitimized, and sustained through psychological mechanisms. Through this synthesis, Animal Farm can be understood not merely as a political allegory but as a psychological case study of manipulation, ideological conditioning, and collective behavioral transformation.

This research carries significant implications for both literary studies and psychological inquiry. For literature, it expands interpretive possibilities by demonstrating that Animal Farm engages deeply with psychological themes underlying authoritarian power. For psychology and interdisciplinary humanities, it shows how literary narratives can model real-world phenomena such as persuasion, conformity, and obedience. Through this integrative lens, the study offers a novel contribution to understanding the complex interplay between power, manipulation, and collective behavior in both fictional and real socio-political contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical approach, commonly used in literary and discourse studies (Creswell, 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This design allows an in-depth exploration of psychological mechanisms, persuasive strategies, and collective behavioral patterns in literary texts. The descriptive-analytical approach ensures textual evidence is systematically examined, categorized, and interpreted according to theoretical frameworks from social psychology, persuasion theory, and collective behavior theory (French & Raven, 1959; Cialdini, 1984; Milgram, 1963; Le Bon, 1895).

Data Source

The primary data consist of 20 selected textual excerpts (corpus) from George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945). The excerpts were selected using purposive sampling, a common strategy in qualitative research for selecting information-rich cases (Patton, 2015). The selection criteria included:

1. Passages where leadership figures assert authority.
2. Scenes depicting collective responses of the animals (obedience, conformity, or rebellion).
3. Passages illustrating manipulative language, propaganda, or psychological coercion.

These 20 excerpts provide a representative corpus that captures both micro-level textual features (rhetorical devices, diction, syntax) and macro-level narrative strategies (plot, characterization, ideological framing).

Data Collection

The data collection process follows standard procedures in qualitative textual research:

1. Textual Reading and Annotation: The entire novella was read carefully to identify passages relevant to power, manipulation, and collective behavior (Krippendorff, 2019).
2. Selection of Corpus: 20 excerpts meeting the selection criteria were purposively selected, ensuring relevance and diversity of contexts.
3. Transcription and Organization: The excerpts were transcribed into a database, preserving their original context, for systematic coding and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Krippendorff, 2019).

Data Analysis

The study applies an integrative psychological-literary framework, combining thematic analysis and discourse analysis:

1. Coding and Categorization: Each excerpt was coded for instances of power assertion, manipulative discourse, and collective behavioral patterns. Codes were applied deductively (based on psychological theories) and inductively (allowing new patterns to emerge).
2. Thematic Analysis: Codes were grouped into themes reflecting psychological mechanisms, including authority, persuasion, fear, propaganda, and group conformity (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3. Interpretation: Themes were interpreted within the theoretical framework, linking textual evidence to social power theory, persuasion theory, and collective behavior theory.

RESULT

The following data shows the findings of discussing take from the novel:

1. Assertion of Authority

Excerpts & Chapters:

1. Napoleon's leadership consolidation – Chapter 3, p. 25: Napoleon uses Squealer to announce farm rules, reinforcing obedience.
2. Expulsion of Snowball – Chapter 5, p. 43: Snowball is driven out to eliminate opposition.
3. Centralization of decision-making – Chapter 6, p. 58: Napoleon takes control over all committees, diminishing collective decision-making.
4. Enforcement through fear – Chapter 8, p. 80: Napoleon uses the dogs to intimidate dissenters.

Analysis:

The repeated assertion of authority illustrates French and Raven's legitimate and coercive power (1959). Authority is reinforced symbolically (expulsion, commands) and psychologically (fear, public demonstrations). The animals' compliance highlights the psychological dynamics of obedience within hierarchical structures.

2. Manipulative Language and Propaganda

Excerpts & Chapters:

1. Milk and apples justification – Chapter 2, p. 14: Squealer convinces animals that pigs need resources "for the good of all."
2. Blame assignment to Snowball – Chapter 6, p. 60: Failures are attributed to Snowball's sabotage.
3. Fear-mongering – Chapter 7, p. 72: Squealer warns animals that Jones may return if rules are not obeyed.
4. Rewriting of commandments – Chapter 10, p. 115: Original commandments are modified to legitimize pigs' privileges.

Analysis:

Manipulative discourse demonstrates Cialdini's principles of persuasion (1984) and Orwell's narrative strategy. Squealer uses selective truth, fear, and repetition to influence collective cognition, maintaining ideological dominance. Language acts as a tool to reshape perception and enforce compliance.

3. Fear Induction and Obedience

Excerpts & Chapters:

1. Use of dogs for intimidation – Chapter 5, p. 45: Dogs prevent dissent, ensuring compliance.
2. Public executions of "traitors" – Chapter 8, p. 82: Fear reinforces obedience and discourages critical thought.

3. Threat of Jones' return – Chapter 7, p. 72: Psychological fear strengthens allegiance to the pigs.

Analysis:

These actions reflect Milgram's findings on obedience (1963). Fear becomes a mechanism to secure conformity and suppress resistance, illustrating how authority leverages emotional responses to maintain control over the collective.

4. Collective Behavior and Herd Mentality

Excerpts & Chapters:
1. Participation in harvest – Chapter 3, p. 28: Animals work enthusiastically under Napoleon's direction.
2. Unquestioning acceptance of rules – Chapter 9, p. 100: Despite deteriorating conditions, animals follow propaganda.
3. Emotional contagion during rallies – Chapter 5, p. 50: Mass gatherings generate excitement and solidarity.

Analysis:

Collective behavior aligns with Le Bon's crowd psychology (1895). Individual critical reasoning is suppressed as group emotion and collective suggestions dominate. The herd mentality explains compliance even when actions conflict with personal well-being.

5. Revision of History and Memory Control

Excerpts & Chapters:
1. Blaming Snowball posthumously – Chapter 6, p. 60: Snowball is scapegoated for failures.
2. Altering commandments – Chapter 10, p. 115: Rules are rewritten to justify pigs' actions.
3. Selective memory narratives – Chapter 7, p. 75: Historical events are reframed to maintain control.

Analysis:

Controlling history exemplifies ideological manipulation. By reshaping collective memory, the pigs enforce obedience and legitimize privileges. Psychological influence extends beyond immediate behavior to long-term belief formation.

6. Manipulation through Exaggeration

Excerpts & Chapters:
1. Exaggerating achievements – Chapter 3, p. 33: Squealer highlights farm successes beyond reality to maintain morale.
2. Overstating productivity – Chapter 4, p. 37: Reports of harvest achievements are amplified to inspire loyalty.

Analysis:

Exaggeration functions as a tool for positive reinforcement, strengthening collective motivation and belief in leadership (Cialdini, 1984).

7. Emotional Control via Rituals

Excerpts & Chapters:

1. Singing "Beasts of England" – Chapter 3, p. 30: Collective singing reinforces shared ideology.
2. Mass rallies celebrating victories – Chapter 5, p. 52: Gatherings generate group enthusiasm and cohesion.

Analysis:

Rituals and shared activities manipulate emotional states and reinforce group identity, consistent with Le Bon's crowd psychology (1895).

8. Obedience through Scapegoating

Excerpts & Chapters:

Blaming Snowball for all misfortunes – Chapter 6, p. 60: Snowball becomes a scapegoat for systemic failures.

Analysis:

Scapegoating directs collective frustration away from authority, sustaining obedience and legitimizing leadership (Milgram, 1963).

9. Control via Surveillance

Excerpts & Chapters:

Napoleon's dogs monitor animals' behavior – Chapter 5, p. 45: Ensures compliance through presence of authority.

Analysis:

Surveillance functions as a psychological control mechanism, promoting self-censorship and adherence to rules.

10. Fear of External Threat

Excerpts & Chapters:

Threat of Mr. Jones returning – Chapter 7, p. 72: Constant reminder of past oppression coerces obedience.

Analysis:

Fear of external threat aligns with Cialdini's principle of scarcity/fear appeal, creating urgency and compliance (1984).

11. Heroization of Leaders

Excerpts & Chapters:

Napoleon portrayed as protector and visionary – Chapter 5, p. 50: Speeches glorify leadership.

Analysis:

Heroization fosters trust and admiration, psychologically binding animals to authority figures (French & Raven, 1959).

12. Collective Endurance of Hardship

Excerpts & Chapters:

Animals labor despite food shortages – Chapter 9, p. 100: Obedience persists even under deteriorating conditions.

Analysis:

Shows groupthink and conformity; collective ideology overrides personal suffering (Le Bon, 1895).

13. Manipulation through Confusion
Excerpts & Chapters:
Conflicting reports of events – Chapter 7, p. 74: Squealer's statements contradict prior facts.
Analysis:
Creating confusion disorients animals, reducing critical thinking and enhancing compliance (Cialdini, 1984).

14. Demonstration of Punishment
Excerpts & Chapters:
Executions of dissenters – Chapter 8, p. 82: Publicly display consequences of disobedience.
Analysis:
Fear-based control is strengthened; deterrence ensures obedience through observation (Milgram, 1963).

15. Symbolic Leadership Rituals
Excerpts & Chapters:
Raising flags, parades – Chapter 5, p. 52: Visual symbols reinforce loyalty.
Analysis:
Symbols create psychological attachment to leadership and ideology, promoting social cohesion (Le Bon, 1895).

16. Rewriting Ideology
Excerpts & Chapters:
Commandments subtly modified – Chapter 10, p. 115: Allows pigs to indulge privileges without opposition.
Analysis
Control of ideology consolidates power and shapes collective belief systems (Orwell, 1945).

17. Reward and Punishment Balance
Excerpts & Chapters:
Praise for loyal workers – Chapter 3, p. 33: Animals rewarded symbolically.
Punishment for dissent – Chapter 8, p. 82: Threats maintain compliance.
Analysis:
Combination of reward and punishment manipulates behavior effectively (Cialdini, 1984; Milgram, 1963).

18. Emotional Manipulation through Fear and Hope
Excerpts & Chapters:
Fear of famine – Chapter 7, p. 72: Threat of starvation motivates obedience.
Hope of prosperity – Chapter 3, p. 28: Success stories motivate participation.

Analysis:
Alternating fear and hope enhances psychological control, increasing loyalty and effort.

19. Suppression of Dissent
Excerpts & Chapters:
Animals discouraged from questioning leadership – Chapter 5, p. 45: Dogs enforce silence.
Analysis:
Suppression of dissent ensures authority remains uncontested; limits critical reasoning (French & Raven, 1959).

20. Psychological Ownership of Ideology
Excerpts & Chapters:
Animals internalize "Animalism" – Chapter 3, p. 28: Ideology is accepted as personal belief.
Analysis:
Internalization demonstrates the success of long-term psychological manipulation, where ideology becomes self-motivating (Cialdini, 1984).

DISCUSSION
The findings from the 20 corpus excerpts in Animal Farm reveal how Orwell meticulously portrays the psychological mechanisms underpinning power, manipulation, and collective behavior. The first key pattern, assertion of authority, demonstrates how Napoleon consolidates power through hierarchical control and intimidation. This aligns with French and Raven's (1959) theory of social power, which categorizes legitimate and coercive power as tools to enforce obedience. The expulsion of Snowball and the centralized decision-making committees exemplify how authority can be both symbolically and psychologically reinforced, creating a system in which subordinates comply due to both fear and perceived legitimacy.

Manipulative language and propaganda are pervasive throughout the narrative. Squealer's strategic use of selective truth, fear, and repetition reflects principles of persuasion as described by Cialdini (1984), including authority, social proof, and scarcity. By convincing animals that milk and apples are "for the good of all" and attributing all failures to Snowball, the pigs manipulate collective cognition to maintain control. Orwell's narrative demonstrates how language functions as a psychological tool to shape perception and maintain ideological dominance, supporting findings by Fairclough (1995) on the discourse-power relationship.

Fear induction emerges as a critical mechanism to enforce obedience. The use of dogs to intimidate animals and the public executions of dissenters illustrate how threat and punishment effectively maintain compliance. This mirrors Milgram's (1963) experiments on obedience, which showed that individuals often follow authority figures even against personal moral judgment when fear or perceived authority is present. The repeated use of fear in Animal Farm underscores its effectiveness in regulating collective behavior.

Collective behavior and herd mentality are also significant themes. The enthusiastic participation of animals in the harvest, mass rallies, and collective singing highlight the role of emotional contagion and social influence in shaping behavior. Le Bon (1895) argued that individuals in crowds are prone to lose self-restraint and rationality, which explains the animals' unquestioning compliance with leadership despite worsening conditions. The findings indicate that group identity and social cohesion can override individual critical thinking, a dynamic central to understanding Orwell's allegory.

Revision of history and memory control further reinforce the pigs' dominance. By rewriting the Seven Commandments and scapegoating Snowball, the pigs manipulate collective memory and justify their privileges. This is consistent with Foucault's (1977) concept of discourse and power, where control over knowledge and historical narrative translates into social control. Orwell's depiction illustrates how long-term obedience is secured not only through immediate fear but also through ideological manipulation.

Finally, the findings demonstrate the interplay of multiple psychological mechanisms. Reward and punishment, fear and hope, manipulation of information, and reinforcement of collective rituals all work together to consolidate power and shape behavior. This multidimensional approach aligns with contemporary theories of social influence, including Moscovici's (1985) work on minority influence and social conformity, which highlights how ideology can become internalized, transforming into self-regulating behavior.

In conclusion, the analysis shows that Animal Farm provides a comprehensive illustration of the psychological processes involved in authority, manipulation, and collective behavior. By combining coercion, propaganda, emotional influence, and memory control, Orwell's narrative offers insight into the dynamics of totalitarian regimes. The findings corroborate social psychological theories on power, persuasion, obedience, and crowd behavior, demonstrating that literature can serve as both a reflection and a pedagogical tool for understanding human social behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the psychological mechanisms of power, manipulation, and collective behavior in George Orwell's Animal Farm. By analyzing 20 selected excerpts from the novel, the research identifies five key dynamics: assertion of authority, manipulative language and propaganda, fear induction and obedience, collective behavior and herd mentality, and revision of history and memory control. Each mechanism plays a critical role in shaping the animals' behavior, sustaining the pigs' dominance, and maintaining the hierarchical social structure of the farm.

The findings demonstrate that authority is reinforced both symbolically and psychologically, aligning with French and Raven's (1959) theory of social power. Manipulative discourse, selective truth, and ideological framing, as exemplified by Squealer, confirm Cialdini's (1984) principles of persuasion and highlight the role of language in controlling perception. Fear, punishment, and public demonstrations of authority further secure obedience, supporting Milgram's (1963) findings on the psychology of compliance. Meanwhile, collective behavior, emotional contagion,

and herd mentality illustrate how group dynamics influence individual decision-making, consistent with Le Bon's (1895) crowd psychology. The manipulation of history and memory emphasizes the long-term ideological control of the masses, in line with Foucault's (1977) insights on discourse and power.

The study contributes to literary and psychological scholarship by demonstrating how Animal Farm functions as an allegorical text that not only critiques totalitarian regimes but also illuminates the underlying social and psychological processes that sustain power structures. By applying psychological approaches to literary analysis, this research bridges the fields of literature, social psychology, and political studies, providing a deeper understanding of both human behavior and literary representation.

In summary, Orwell's Animal Farm exemplifies the intricate interplay of authority, persuasion, fear, collective behavior, and memory control, revealing how social and psychological mechanisms can be utilized to dominate and manipulate communities. This research underscores the significance of examining literature through a psychological lens, offering insights that are relevant not only for literary analysis but also for broader studies of human behavior, social influence, and governance.

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